Can the 'dry ground' in Isaiah 53:2 mean the same as infertile ground?

Yes. The Hebrew phrase for “dry ground” in Isaiah 53:2 naturally carries the idea of arid, unproductive land and so “infertile ground” is a fair paraphrase at the level of imagery, though “dry” is the more precise lexical term.[1]

Hebrew wording and sense

The phrase is מֵאֶרֶץ צִיָּה, literally “from a land of dryness / parched land.” The noun צִיָּה has a semantic range of desert, wasteland, drought, barren place, i.e., terrain where growth is not expected or is highly unlikely. In that sense the picture is of a root emerging where conditions are hostile to life, which overlaps strongly with the notion of “infertile ground.”[1]

Metaphorical force in Isaiah 53:2

Commentators regularly take the “dry ground” to signify disadvantaged or unfavorable conditions—socially, spiritually, and politically—where the Servant’s growth and success would seem improbable. This can refer to Israel’s spiritually desolate state or to the Servant’s own lowly, unimpressive environment and appearance, emphasizing that nothing in the “soil” explains his life and mission. In that figurative sense, “infertile ground” captures the idea of an environment that does not naturally nurture or support the Servant, from which his emergence is therefore striking.[2] [3] [4] [5] [6]

Nuance: “dry” versus “infertile”

“Dry” highlights lack of water and harshness; “infertile” emphasizes lack of productivity. Arid land in the Ancient Near Eastern imagination is typically both dry and unfruitful, so the concepts overlap, but the text’s wording leans on physical dryness as the image and leaves readers to infer the improbability of growth. Translating or glossing the phrase as “infertile ground” is therefore interpretive rather than strictly literal, but it does faithfully reflect the theological thrust: the Servant arises where there is no natural expectation of life, fruitfulness, or success.[7] [1]

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1. https://biblehub.com/lexicon/isaiah/53-2.htm
2. https://rts.edu/resources/a-root-out-of-dry-ground-isaiah-532/
3. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/isaiah/53-2.htm
4. https://christiancourier.com/articles/what-is-the-meaning-of-tender-plant-out-of-dry-ground
5. https://www.studylight.org/commentary/isaiah/53-2.html

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7. https://www.bethmelekh.com/yaakovs-commentary/isaiah-53-the-servant-king-messiah-lamb-of-god
8. https://twojourneys.org/devotional/like-a-tender-shoot-out-of-dry-ground/
9. https://kelleys4christ.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/kelley-noah-isa-53-presentation.pdf
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